

Marissa Piccolo
Testimony

To members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for having us here today. Although I personally could not be in attendance, this is an issue we, as students, need to speak up about.

My name is Marissa Piccolo and I am president of the UConn Democrats. This fall, we worked hard to encourage students to get out to vote. It is no secret that youth political involvement is dwindling. The best way for us to connect with students and convince them to vote was explaining how the Connecticut state government made Next Generation Connecticut possible. NextGen Connecticut, as many of you are aware, is the vision for UConn to expand as a major, top-tier research university over the next decade.

Many of these students were not traditionally political active, but became first-time voters. Biology, chemistry, and engineering students were able to personally attest to the impact of NextGen Connecticut on their academic careers - new spaces in the lab were now becoming available to them as undergraduates. Many of these same students have decided to stay up to date with state politics following the election, and are disappointed with the proposed budget cuts. Some are here today.

The budget cuts to the public university and college system do much more than send a dispiriting message, however. They are first and foremost insufficient. We understand that tough decisions have had to be made over the budget, however it will leave our university, UConn, \$40 million short for general operation.

This past fall semester, I worked as an undergraduate research assistant in the Roper Center for Public Opinion. The Center was forced to shut down this February due to budget cuts. It was truly disheartening to see graduate students and advisors I had come to

know struggling to find the time and resources to finish their dissertations – but more drastically the several office workers now without jobs after over 30 years.

This will only worsen with the budget as it stands now. As an honors student, I came to UConn for the relatively low tuition and variety of opportunities for students. UConn for the past few years has remained just within or on the edge of the Top 20 Public Universities list according to U.S. News and World Report. I fear that at such a critical time for the university's growth, these budget cuts will be devastating.

My younger brother, a freshman in high school, dreams of one day attending UConn. I hope his Husky Spirit and academic motivation can be met by our state renewing its commitment to our public universities and colleges.

Thank you.